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## Book Briefs

In this section we acknowledge new books we have received over the last year for which we have not provided full book reviews. We have organized these into topical categories to help readers become aware of new books in specific areas. Unsigned book briefs are by the editor.

### Spiritual Formation

***Fasting with the Lord's Prayer: Experience a Deeper and More Powerful Relationship with God.* Elmer L. Towns. Ventura, CA: Regal, 2014, 206 pp., paper. ISBN 978-0-8307-6880-6**

This book offers a unique presentation on the study and application of the Lord's Prayer in our spiritual lives. The author works from the premise that we should read Matthew 6:9-18 together and not just focus upon verses 9-13 – the Lord's Prayer. Since the days of the Authorised King James Version, verse 14 has been the beginning of a new paragraph. This does not eliminate seeing a connection; spiritually there is benefit for linking the sections. Fasting is not one of the top elements discussed in spirituality presently, but by linking this prayer there is real merit. This is an easy-to-read book with plenty of illustration and application being made. It could be used in private devotions or a study group. The book has three sections: the first about prayer and fasting; the second about the seven petitions as Towns divides the Lord's Prayer (not quite identical to the Westminster Shorter Catechism); and the third section about 21 days of daily reading on fasting using the Lord's Prayer. I found myself generally following along and in agreement, but I did not fully endorse the foreword and its view of fasting; on occasion this view also emerges in the main text.

### Christian Education

***Evangelical Christian Education: Mid-Twentieth-Century Foundational Texts.* Fernando Arzola Jr. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014, 100 pp., paper. ISBN 978-1-62564-596-8**

What an amazing little text to use in all foundational level Christian education or catechetical courses in Christian colleges around the world. It could also be used for Christian education seminars, workshops, or training events.

Here is an excellent introductory primer on the basics through five primary texts carefully selected and compiled. Arzola, who teaches at Nyack College in New York, has made only brief comment to each document, thus ensuring that the essays speak for themselves. The work is introduced and commended by Kevin Lawson of Biola University and an editor for the Christian Educators of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Project ([www.christianeducators20.com](http://www.christianeducators20.com)). The five selections are Charles Eavey, “Principles of Teaching for Christian Teachers”; Frank Gabelein, “Christian Education in Democracy”; Findley Edge, “Teaching for Results”; Lois LeBar, “Education That Is Christian”; and Lawrence Richards, “Creative Bible Teaching”. Each in its own way states classical evangelical principles on Christian education. I plan on using this small book in college classes and in Saturday workshops – delighted to have something this small and economical to use as a text. Hopefully a second printing will correct some typesetting problems (pp.13, 18, 20).

## **Christianity and Culture**

***Christianity and the Veneration of the Ancestors: Should a Christian Consult the Dead?* Afrika Mhlophe. Belville, SA: SALT Publishers, 2013, 332 pp., paper. ISBN 978-1-92057139-9**

Here is a recommended new publication from an evangelical Christian perspective, offering a biblical challenge to think through this subject of the veneration of the ancestors (sometimes simply referred to as ancestral worship for short). Lest readers think this is just an African interest subject, readers should think deeply about early Celtic or Druidic spirituality and new/renewed spirituality practices in the Western World – the topic is much more global than often conceded. In twenty-five easy-to-read chapters, Mhlophe surveys the issues of death, the afterlife, ancestors and the living, and their interactions with the dead. He concludes with clear warnings about idolatry and syncretism. If as a preacher or Christian you have not carefully thought through for instance the story of Saul seeking a medium to consult the dead prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 17), then this book will help you. A bibliography has been included by the author. Afrika Mhlophe lives in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, where he is a pastor and also a speaker at many conferences.

***Freed by God But Imprisoned by Culture.* Afrika Mhlophe. Port Elizabeth, SA: Step Up Foundation, 2015, 327 pp., paper. ISBN 978-0-620-64687-1**

What a great title for a book! The title should alert us to the reality that, though some of the specifics may be African, the subject is something that global Christianity has dealt with in the past and continues to wrestle with. The subject is as old as both testaments of the Bible. This book shows

marked organisational structure from the one above. *Freed by God But Imprisoned by Culture* is divided into seven parts with thirty-one chapters. The book's foreword is by Michael Cassidy, founder of African Enterprise. The seven parts are: understanding where we have come from, understanding culture, understanding issues of identity, understanding the power of influence, understanding the power of culture, understanding African cultural practices, and understanding cultural fascism. The book once again is based upon evangelical theological presuppositions and in many ways helps deepen the 2013 book and build upon that book by providing the larger context. On occasion a reader may also ask for further clarification such as on current circumcision practices beyond tribal cultural reasons. A bibliography is also included in this book. The theme of the book is well stated on the back cover: "This is a book of freedom. It is a gift to those who are imprisoned by culture and also to those who desire to be equipped in how to guard their freedom from the control of man-made culture."

## Christian Ethics

***Work and Wealth in Scripture: How to Grow, Prosper, and Work as a Christian.* Lawrence A. Clayton. Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2015, 148 pp., paper. ISBN 978-1-62032-256-7**

The subject for this book is wonderful but unfortunately I did not feel the writing matched my expectations. The book contains many stories and illustrations and sprinkled texts throughout, ranging over some excellently entitled chapters such as, "What is Valuable?", "Name it and Claim It", "The Protestant Work Ethic", and "How Work Got to be a Dirty Word". As I read the book I felt like I was reading a self-published work that lacked a strong advising editor to help the writer achieve the goal. There are some good thoughts about the rise of the Prosperity Gospel, yet strange enough some of the key texts did not surface in the chapter dealing with this subject. We hear much in the book about Max Weber and also about certain views of the Puritans, but I was not convinced at the end of the day that the title matched the contents – did the book really present a fair treatment of work and wealth in Scripture? No. It was disappointing for a study book on the subject.

## Pastoral

***Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive.* Thom S. Rainer. Nashville, TN: B&H, 2014, 102 pp., hc. ISBN 978-1-4336-8392-3**

This small book began as the author's blog postings called "Autopsy of a Deceased Church". They became his most popular postings and hence this

book. Autopsies are performed upon the dead to discover the cause of death. Rainer applies it to both “dying” or churches near death and closed churches. The sad reality is that many church members and their leaders do not want to admit the reality of death. Amongst his topics one will find discussions about the past – “the golden days”, failure to consider the changing community and the development of a fortress mentality, inward budgets and being driven by paying the staff, the Great Commission becoming the great omission, lack of real congregational prayer, and churches with no clear purpose. Rainer concludes with some practical suggestions in two closing units. Each chapter/unit has discussion questions. This little book could serve as a helpful tool in church revitalization discussions with church leadership. It should also be in Bible college and seminary libraries, as it addresses something not always considered in training for the ministry.

***Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces That Keep Us Apart.* Christena Cleveland. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2013, 220 pp., paper. ISBN 978-0-8308-4403-6**

This book is a social psychologist’s efforts to help explain why Christians cannot always get along. The author also offers suggestions as to how to try to overcome such divisions, although I felt the book was much more on the analysis side than on the practical side of what to do. It begins with an intriguing story/narrative of the Right Christian and the Wrong Christian, which is very captivating if not also humorous. Then we are led through various analytical chapters and introduced very well to several social or psychological tests, experiments, theories about divisions in human groups, which the author thoughtfully applies to the Christian community. One will learn that culture and our desire for homogeneity are often much bigger factors than we recognise. This book is a helpful tool for reflection over what are really our blind spots which become great tragedies leading to numerous divisions amongst Christians. This is not a theological tome on Christian unity – rather a Christian psychologist’s analysis and resource to help deal with a common problem.

## Theology

***The Doctrines of Grace: Student Edition.* Shane Lems. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013, 143 pp., paper. ISBN 978-1-59638-740-9**

Introducing others to the doctrines of grace can be a daunting task. Shane Lems has endeavored to aid the teacher in reaching that goal by providing this concise overview in an accessible format. This helpful little work of twelve lessons – including the introduction and conclusion – devotes two chapters to each of the five points as they are dealt with in the familiar TU-

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LIP succession. Lems has intended that this book be used in a classroom setting, but it could just as easily be utilized as a self-study for the discerning student. Individual chapters are well divided, emphasize key terms or principles, and conclude with study questions and memory verses. These components work together to provide the student with the biblical basis for each belief. Appendices start on page 91 and offer suggestions for further reading; a reference chart for TULIP in the confessions; Scripture index; and, finally, the Canons of Dort in their entirety. Although brevity may just as often be a liability as it is a virtue, Shane Lems has diligently pursued the latter in this primer on the doctrines of grace and provides an excellent introduction to this essential body of truth.

*Steve Mollins*